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# FEODOR DOSTOIEVSKY

## TRAGEDIST, PROPHET AND PSYCHOLOGIST

BY JOSEPH COLLINS

A HUNDRED years ago, in Moscow a being manifested his existence, who in the fullness of extraordinary vision and intellectuality heralded a religious rebirth, became the prophet of a new moral, ethical and geographical order in the world, and the prototype of a new hero. Time has accorded Feodor Mikhailovitch Dostoievsky the position of one of the greatest writers of the nineteenth century, and as time passes his position becomes more secure. Like the prophet of old during life he was fastened between two pieces of timber—debts and epilepsy—and sawn asunder by his creditors and his conscience. Posterity links his name with Pushkin and Tolstoi as the three great writers of his times. They are to the Russian Renaissance what Leonardo, Michelangelo and Raphael were to the Italian Renaissance.

It is appropriate now, the centenary of his birth, to make a brief statement of Dostoievsky's position as a writer or novelist, and in so doing estimate must be made of him as a prophet, preacher, psychologist, pathologist, artist and individual. Though he was not schooled to speak as expert in any of these fields, yet speak of them he did and in a way that would have reflected credit upon a professor. It is particularly the field of morbid psychology, usually called psychiatry, that Dostoievsky made uniquely his own. He described many of the nervous and mental disorders, such as mania and depression, the psychoneuroses, hysteria, obsessive states, epilepsy, moral insanity, alcoholism, and that mysterious mental and moral constitution called "degeneracy", (apparently first hand, for there is no evidence or indication that he had access to books on mental medicine), in such a way that alienists recognize in his descriptions master-

pieces in the same way that the painter recognizes the apogee of his art in Giotto or Velasquez.

Like Baudelaire in France and Nietzsche in Germany, whom he resembled morally and intellectually, Dostoevsky was an intellectual romantic in rebellion against life. His determination seemed to be to create an individual who should defy life, and when he had defied it to his heart's content "to hand God back his ticket", having no further need of it as the journey of existence was at an end. There is no place to go, nothing to do, everything worth trying has been tried and found valueless, and wherever he turns his gaze he sees the angel standing upon the sea and upon the earth avowing that there should be time no longer, so he puts a bullet in his temple if his name is Svidrigailov, or soaps a silken cord so that it will support his weight when one end is attached to a large nail and the other to his neck, if it is Stavrogin. His antinomian heroes from Raskolnikof to Karamazov are the prototypes of Baudelaire's Dandy and the brothers of Nietzsche's Superman. It is not with the passions of the body or of the senses that they contend but with those of the mind. Here and there one of them like Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch Stavrogin "could give lessons to the Marquis de Sade, and belonged to a secret society for practising beastly sensuality", but this was quite incidental and by no means a leading motive in his life. The fire that burns within them is abstraction and the fuel that replenishes it is thought—thought of whence and whither. By it the possessors are lashed to a conduct that surpasses that of hate, jealousy, lubricity or any of the baser passions as the light of an incandescent bulb surpasses a tallow candle. His heroes are all men of parts, either originally endowed with great intelligence or brought to a certain elevation of intellectuality by education. Their conduct, their actions, their misdeeds, their crimes are the direct result of their argumentation, not of concrete, but of abstract things and chiefly the nature and existence of God, the varieties of use that an individual may permit his intelligence, freewill, free determination, and of the impositions of dogma founded on faith and inspiration which seem contrary to reason and science.

All of his heroes are more or less insane. Herein lies Dos-

toievsky's strength and his weakness in character creation. None of his heroes can be held fully responsible in a court of justice. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings the Lord ordained strength, but there is no writing to show that out of the mouths of the insane comes wisdom. Not that insanity is inimical to brilliant, even wise, utterance, but the pragmatic application of wisdom to life calls for sanity.

Dostoevsky himself was abnormal. He was what the physician calls a neuropathic and psychopathic individual. In addition, he had genuine epilepsy, that is, epilepsy not dependent upon some accidental disease, such as infection, injury or new growth. He was of psychopathic temperament and at different times in his life displayed hallucination, obsession and hypochondria. That the reader may understand what is meant by the psychopathic temperament, I can do no better than to quote a description of it as displayed by one of his characters:

An unstable balance of the psychic impulses, an overfacile tendency to emotion, an overswift interchange of mental phases, an abnormally violent reaction of the psychic mechanism. The feature most striking to the beholder in the character of such sufferers is its heterogeneous medley of moods and whims, of sympathies and antipathies; of ideas in turn joyous, stern, gloomy, depressed and philosophical; of aspirations at first charged with energy then dying away to nothing. Another feature peculiar to these sufferers is their self-love. They are the most naïve of egoists; they talk exclusively and persistently and absorbedly of themselves; they strive always to attract the general attention, to excite the general interest and to engage everyone in conversation concerning their personality, their ailments and even their vices.

No one can read the *Letters of Dostoevsky* or the *Journal of an Author* without recognizing the self-portraiture.

The facts of Dostoevsky's life that are important are that his father, surgeon to the Workhouse Hospital at Moscow, was a stern, suspicious, narrow-minded, gloomy, distrustful man who made a failure of life. "He has lived in the world fifty years and yet he has the same opinions of mankind that he had thirty years ago", wrote Feodor when seventeen years old. His mother was tender-minded, pious and domestic, and died early of tuberculosis. Although much has been written of his boyhood, there is nothing particularly interesting in it bearing on his career save that he was sensitive, introspective, unsociable, and early

displayed a desire to be alone. The hero of the book *Youth* relates that in the lowest classes of the gymnasium he scorned all relations with those of his class who surpassed him in any way in the sciences, physical strength or in clever repartee. He did not hate such a person nor wish him harm. He simply turned away from him, that being his nature. These characteristics run like a red thread through the entire life of Dostoevsky. A tendency to day-dreaming was apparent in his earliest years, and he gives graphic accounts of hallucination in *An Author's Diary*. At the age of sixteen he was admitted to the School of Engineering and remained there six years. During the latter part of his student days he decided upon literature as a career. Before taking it up, however, he had a brief experience with life after he had obtained his commission as engineer, which showed him to be totally incapable of dealing with its everyday eventualities, particularly in relation to money, whose purpose he knew but whose value was ever to remain a secret. It was then that he first displayed inability to subscribe or to submit to ordinary social conventions; indeed, a determination to transgress them.

From his earliest years the misfortunes of others hurt him and distressed him, and in later life the despised and the rejected, the poor and the oppressed always had his sympathy and his understanding. God and the people, that is the Russian people, were his passion. "The people have a lofty instinct for truth. They may be dirty, degraded, repellent, but without them and in disregard of them nothing useful can be effected." The intellectuals who held themselves aloof from the masses he could not abide, and atheists, and their propaganda socialism, were anathema. He demanded of man who arrogated to himself a distinction above his fellow man, "who go to the people not to learn to know it, but condescendingly to instruct and patronize it," not only repentance but expiation by suffering.

His first important literary contribution was entitled *Poor Folk*. He was fortunate enough to be praised by his contemporaries and particularly by Bielinsky, an editor and great critic, who saw in the central idea of the story corroboration of his favorite theory, viz.: abnormal social conditions distort and dehumanize

mankind to such an extent that they lose the human form and semblance. As the result of this publication, Dostoevsky made the acquaintance of the leading literary lights of St. Petersburg, many of whom praised him too immoderately for his own good, as he produced nothing worthy of his fame until many years after the event in his life which must be looked upon as the beginning of his real mental awakement: banishment and penal servitude in Siberia.

Toward the middle of the nineteenth century the doctrines of the Frenchman, Charles Fourier, were having such acceptance in this country, where the North American Phalanx in New Jersey and the Brook Farm in Massachusetts were thriving, as to encourage the disciples of that sentimental but wholly mad socialist in other lands, particularly in Russia, that their hopes of seeing the world dotted with *phalansteres* might be fulfilled. Dostoevsky later stated most emphatically that he never believed in Fourierism, but nibbling at it nearly cost him his life. In fact, all that stood between him and death was the utterance of the word "Go", which it would seem the lips of the executioner had puckered to utter when the reprieve came. Dostoevsky was suspected of being a Revolutionary. One evening at the Petrashevsky Club he declaimed Pushkin's poem on Solitude:

My friends, I see the people no longer oppressed,  
And slavery fallen by the will of the Czar,  
And a dawn breaking over us, glorious and bright,  
And our country lightened by freedom's rays.

In discussion he suggested that the emancipation of the peasantry might have to come through a rising. Thus he became suspected. But it was not until he denounced the censorship and reflected on its severity and injustice that he was taken into custody. He and twenty-one others were sentenced to death. He spent four years in a Siberian prison and there became acquainted with misery, suffering and criminality that beggars description.

What a number of national types and characters I became familiar with in the prison; I lived into their lives and so I believe I know them really well. Many tramps' and thieves' careers were laid bare to me, and above all the whole wretched existence of the common people. I learnt to know the Russian people as only a few know them.

After four years he was, through the mediation of powerful friends, transferred for five years to military service in Siberia, chiefly at Semipalatinsk. In 1859 he was permitted to return to St. Petersburg, and in the twenty years that followed he published those books upon which his fame rests, namely, *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot*, *The Possessed*, *The Journal of an Author*, and *The Brothers Karamazov*, and a tremendous amount of magazine, newspaper work and potboilers. In 1867 he was obliged to leave Russia to escape imprisonment for debt, and he remained abroad, chiefly in Switzerland, for four years.

In his appeal to General Todleben to get transferred from the military to the civil service and to be permitted to employ himself in literature, he said:

Perhaps you have heard something of my arrest, my trial and the supreme ratification of the sentence which was given in the case concerning me in the year 1849. I was guilty and am very conscious of it. I was convicted of the intention (but only the intention) of acting against the Government; I was lawfully and quite justly condemned; the hard and painful experiences of the ensuing years have sobered me and altered my views in many respects, but then while I was still blind I believed in all the theories and Utopias. For two years before my offense I had suffered from a strange moral disease—I had fallen into hypochondria. There was a time even when I lost my reason. I was exaggeratedly irritable, had a morbidly developed sensibility and the power of distorting the most ordinary events into things immeasurable.

While Dostoevsky was in prison his physical health improved very strikingly, but despite this his epilepsy, which had previously manifested itself only in vague or minor attacks, became fully developed. Attempts have been made to prove that prison life and particularly its hardships and inhumanities were responsible in a measure for Dostoevsky's epilepsy, but such allegations are no more acceptable than that which attributes it to his father's alcoholism. His epilepsy was a part of his general make-up, a part of his constitution. It was an integral part of him and it became an integral part of his books.

The phenomena of epilepsy may be said to be the epileptic personality and the attack with its warning, its manifestations and the after-effects. The disease is veiled in the same mystery to-day as it was when Hercules was alleged to have had it. Nothing is known of its causation or of its dependency, and all that can

truthfully be said of the personality of the epileptic is that it is likely to display psychic disorder, evanescent or fixed. Attacks are subject to the widest variation both as to frequency and intensity, but the most enigmatic things about the disease are the warnings of the attack, and the phenomena that sometimes appear vicariously of the attack; the epileptic equivalent it is called. Dostoevsky had these *auræ* and equivalents in an unusual way and with extraordinary intensity, and narration of them as they were displayed in the different characters of his creation who were afflicted with epilepsy and of their effects and consequences is an important part of every one of his great books. Dostoevsky would seem to have been of the belief that a brain in which some of the mechanisms are disordered may yet remain superior both intellectually and morally to others less affected, and that the display of such weakness or maladjustment may put the possessor in tune with the Infinite, may permit them to blend momentarily with the Eternal Harmony, to be restored temporarily to the Source of its temporal emanation. Although he describes this in his *Letters*, as he experienced it, he elaborates it in his epileptic heroes and in none so seductively as in *The Idiot* where he makes Prince Myshkin say:

He thought amongst other things how in his epileptic condition there was one stage, just before the actual attack, when suddenly in the midst of sadness, mental darkness and oppression his brain flared up, as it were, and with an unwonted outburst all his vital powers were vivified simultaneously. The sensation of living and of self-consciousness was increased at such moments almost tenfold. They were moments like prolonged lightning. As he thought over this afterward in a normal state he often said to himself that all these flashes and beams of the highest self-realization, self-consciousness and "highest existence" were nothing but disease, the interruption of the normal state. If this were so, then it was by no means the highest state, but, on the contrary, it must be reckoned as the very lowest. And yet he came at last to the very paradoxical conclusion: What matter if it is a morbid state? What difference can it make that the tension is abnormal, if the result itself, if the moment of sensation when remembered and examined in the healthy state proves to be in the highest degree harmony and beauty, and gives an unheard of and undreamed of feeling of completion, of balance, of satisfaction and exultant prayerful fusion with the highest synthesis of life? If at the last moment of consciousness before the attack he had happened to say to himself lucidly and deliberately "for this one moment one might give one's whole



life", then certainly that moment would be worth a lifetime. However, he did not stand out for dialectics; obfuscation, mental darkness and idiocy stand before him as the obvious consequences of those loftiest moments.

It is a question for the individual to decide whether one would give his whole life for a moment of perfection and bliss, but it is probable that no one would without assurance that some permanent advantage, some growth of spirit that could be retained, some impress of spirituality that was indelible, such as comes from an understanding reading of Hamlet or a comprehended rendering of Parsifal, would flow from it or follow it. But to have it and then come back to a world that is "just one damn thing after another", as someone has said who recognizes that there is no surer way of causing amusement in his fellow man than by using a swear word without passion, it is impossible to believe. Dostoevsky was right when he said that Myshkin could look forward to obfuscation, mental darkness and imbecility with some certainty, for physicians experienced with epilepsy know empirically that the unfortunates who have panoplied warnings, and especially illusions, are most liable to become demented early. But that all epileptics with such warnings do not suffer this degradation is attested by the life of Dostoevsky who was in his mental summation when death seized him in his sixtieth year.

Another phenomenon of epilepsy that Dostoevsky makes many of his characters display is detachment of the spirit from the body. They cease to feel their bodies at supreme moments, such as at the moment of condemnation, of premeditated murder or planned crime. In other words, they are thrown into a state of ecstasy similar to that responsible for the mystic utterances of St. Theresa, or of insensibility to obvious agonies such as those of Santa Fina. He not only depicts the phenomena of the epileptic attack, its warnings and its after-effects in the most masterful way, as they have never been rendered in literature, lay or scientific, but he has also described many varieties of the disease. Before he was exiled, in 1847, he gave a most perfect description of the epileptic constitution as it displayed itself in Murin, a character in *The Landlady*. The disease, as it displays itself in the classical way, is revealed by Nelly in *The Insulted and Injured*, but it is in

Myshkin in *The Idiot*, that we see epilepsy transforming the individual from adult infantilism, gradually, almost imperceptibly to imbecility, the victim meantime displaying nobility and tender-mindedness that make the reader's heart go out to him.

The first fruits of Dostoievsky's activities after he had obtained permission to publish were inconsequential. It was not until the appearance of *Letters from a Deadhouse*, which revealed his experiences and thoughts while in prison, and the volume called *The Despised and the Rejected*, that the literary world of St. Petersburg realized that the brilliant promise which he had given in 1846 was realized. Some of his literary adventures, especially in journalism, got him into financial difficulties, and he began to write under the lash, as he describes it, and against time.

In 1865 appeared the novel by which he is widely known, *Crime and Punishment*, in which Dostoievsky's first great anti-nomian hero, Raskolnikov, a repentant nihilist, is first introduced to the reader. He believes that he has a special right to live, to rebel against society, to transgress every law and moral precept and to follow the dictates of his own will and the lead of his own thought. Such a proud, arrogant, intellectual spirit requires to be cleansed, and inasmuch as the verity, the essence of life lies in humility, Dostoievsky makes his hero murder an old pawnbroker and her sister and then proceeds to put him through the most profound mental agony imaginable. At the same time his mother and sister undergo profound vicarious suffering, while a successor of Mary Magdalene succors him in his increasingly agonized state and finally accompanies him to penal servitude. Many times Raskolnikov appears upon the point of confessing his crime from the torments of his own conscience but, in reality, Svidrigailov, a strange monster of sin and sentiment, and the police officer, Petrovitch, a forerunner of Sherlock Holmes, suggest the confession to him and between the effect of their suggestion and the appeal of Sonia, whose love moves him strangely, he confesses but does not repent. He does not repent because he has done no sin. He has committed no crime. The scales have not yet fallen from his eyes. That is reserved for the days and nights of his prison life and is to be mediated by Sonia's sacrificial heroism. It is

interesting to contemplate Dostoevsky at the state of development when he wrote *Crime and Punishment*, or rather the state of development of his idea of free will. Raskolnikov has the same relation to Stavrogin of *The Possessed* and to Kirillov, the epileptic of the same book, as one of the trial pictures of the figures in the Last Supper has to Leonardo's masterpiece. Dostoevsky apparently was content to describe a case of moral imbecility in its most attractive way, and then when he had outlined its lineaments to leave it and not adjust it to the other groupings of the picture that was undertaken. It would seem that his interest had got switched from Raskolnikov to Svidrigailov, who has dared to outrage covenants and conventions, laws and morality, and has measured his will against all things. Svidrigailov knows the difference between good and evil, right and wrong, indeed he realizes it with great keenness, and when he finds that he is up against it, as it were, and has no escape, he puts the revolver to his temple and pulls the trigger. Death is the only thing he has not tried, and why wait to see whether eternity is just one little room like a bath house in the country, or whether it is something beyond conception? Why not find out at once as everything has been found out? Svidrigailov is Dostoevsky's symbol of the denial of God, the denial of a will beyond his own. "If there is a will beyond my own, it must be an evil will because pain exists. Therefore I must will evil to be in harmony with it. If there is no will beyond my own, then I must assert my own will until it is free of all check beyond itself. Therefore I must will evil."

Raskolnikov represents the conflict of will with the element of moral duty and conscience, and Svidrigailov represents its conflict with refined, deliberate passion. This same will in conflict with the will of the people, the State, is represented by Stavrogin and Shatov, while its conflict with metaphysical and religious mystery is represented by Karamazov, Myshkin and Kirillov. Despite the fact that they pass through the furnace of burning conflicts and the fire of inflaming passions, the force of dominant will is ever supreme. Their human individuality, as represented by their ego, remains definite and concrete. It is untouched, unaltered, undissolved. Though they oppose themselves to the elements that are devouring them, they continue to assert their ego and self-will

even when their end is at hand. Myshkin, Aloysha and Zosima submit to God's will but not to man's.

*Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov* are the books by which Dostoievsky is best known in this country, and the latter, though unfinished, was intended by him to be his great work, "a work that is very dear to me for I have put a great deal of my inmost self into it", and it has been so estimated by the critics. Indeed, it is the summary of all his thoughts, of all his doubts, of all his fancies, and such statement of his faith as he could formulate. It is saturated in mysticism and it is a *vade mecum* of psychiatry. It is the narrative of the life of an egoistic, depraved, sensuous monster, who is a parasite, a cynic, a scoffer, a drunkard and a profligate, the synthesis of which, when combined with moral anæsthesia, constitutes degeneracy, and of his three legitimate sons and their mistresses, and of an epileptic bastard son who resulted from the rape of an idiot girl. Material for a tragedy indeed, and a tragedy it is from which flows a follower of Christ who Dostoievsky confidently believed was the prototype of him who would fulfill his Saviour's mission. The eldest son, Dimitri, grows up unloved, unguided, unappreciated, frankly hostile to his father whom he hates. This hatred becomes intense when they are rivals for Grushenka's favors, so that it costs him no pang to become a parricide on convincing himself that the father has been a successful rival. On being assured of his mistress's love, he forgets his crime in a drinking bout. Psychologically he represents the type of unstable, weak-willed, uninhibited being who cannot learn self-control. Such individuals may pass unmarked so long as they live in orderly surroundings, but as soon as they wander from the straight path they get into trouble. Their irritability, manifested for the smallest cause, may give rise to attacks of boundless fury which are further increased by alcohol and the gravest crimes are often committed in these conditions. The normal inhibitions are entirely absent; there is no reflection, no weighing of the costs. The thought which develops in the brain is at once translated into action. Their actions are irrational, arbitrary, dependent upon the moment, governed by accidental factors.

Despite overwhelming proof, Dimitri denies his guilt from the

start. It is an open question if the motive of this denial is repentance, shame, love for Grushenka, or fear. The three experts of the trial each has his own opinion. The first two declare the murderer to be abnormal. The third regards him as normal. The author himself has made it easy to judge of Dimitri's state of mind. Though on the boundary line of accountability the murderer was not in a pathological condition such as to exclude his free determination; however, he was not fully responsible for his crime and extenuating circumstances had to be conceded by the judge.

The younger brother, Ivan, is characterized by the prosecuting attorney as a well-educated and talented youth, gifted with a high intelligence. He is a cynic and has lost all faith. Indeed, he is constitutionally devoid of faith, and intellectually adverse to it and to morality. His fate is to brood over the destiny of mankind, to accept God with his lips but not with his heart, for he cannot forgive Him for having made the world and made known the promise of eternal harmony. The transition of Ivan's thought under the influences of dream first and hallucination later is one of the most masterly things in modern literature. He does not feel guiltless of his brother's crime, for he knew Dimitri's intention but allowed things to take their course. The parricide oppresses his soul and under the pressure of his guilt he becomes insane. At the trial he appears fatigued, almost dying, and accuses himself of his father's murder. Ivan, like all the Karamazov characters, is a degenerate and unbalanced personality. His psychosis is a delirium characterized by hallucinations. The servant Smerdyakof, the illegitimate son of old Karamazov and the idiot girl, is very carefully delineated by Dostoevsky. He is epileptic, and the author describes the disease down to the smallest detail, often seeming to identify himself with the fictitious character. He is weak, speaks slowly and moves his tongue with difficulty. A short time before the trial he kills himself by hanging. Smerdyakof presents all the typical signs of the epileptic character. In childhood he is cruel, later he becomes solitary and misanthropical. His behavior is pedantic. He broods, is preoccupied with religious problems, and his attitude varies from subserviency to impertinence.

Grushenka is a genuine case of hysteria. The daughter of well-to-do parents, at an early age she is seduced by an officer, leaves her home and later becomes the mistress of an old man. Her beauty attracts men, she flirts with them, wants to dominate them but is chary of her favors. She lusts after Aloysha, the pious son, and promises a sum of money to Rakitin to be paid when he brings him to her. Her toying between father and son is truly hysterical. When she has finally decided in favor of the son, she firmly clings to him despite his guilt and is ready to follow him to Siberia, although she has only played with him heretofore.

It is Aloysha who is Dostoevsky's superman. He is the essence of Myshkin and Stavrogin and Karamazov and Father Zosima, the residue that is left in the crucible when their struggles were reduced, their virtues and their vices distilled. He is Myshkin whose mind has not been destroyed by epilepsy, he is Stavrogin who has seen light before his soul was sold to the devil, he is a Karamazov who has been redeemed by prayer and good works, he is the apotheosis of Father Zosima. "He felt clearly and as it were tangibly that something firm and unshakable as that vault of heaven had entered into his soul. It was as though some idea had seized the sovereignty of his mind—and it was for all his life and for ever and for ever." In other words, Aloysha realized in a mild form and continuously that which Myshkin realized as the result of disease and spasmodically. Aloysha went into a state of faith, of resignation, of adjustment with the Infinite, and Myshkin went into dementia via ecstasy.

*The Idiot* was one of Dostoevsky's books that had a cold reception from the Russian reading public but which has been, next to *The Brothers Karamazov* and *Crime and Punishment*, the most popular in this country. The basic idea is the representation of a truly perfect and noble man, and it is not at all astonishing that Dostoevsky made him an epileptic. He had been impressed, he said, that all writers who had sought to represent Absolute Beauty were unequal to the task. It is so difficult, for the beautiful is the ideal and ideals have long been wavering and waning in civilized Europe. There is only one figure of absolute beauty, Christ, and he patterns Prince Myshkin upon the Divine model.

He brings him in contact with Nastasya Filipovna, who is the incarnation of the evil done in the world and this evil is represented symbolically by Dostoievsky as the outrage of a child. The nine years of brooding which Nastasya had following the outrage inflicted upon her as a child by Prince Tosky had imprinted upon her face something which Myshkin recognized as the pain of the world, and from which he cannot deliver himself and which he cannot mitigate for her. She marries him after agonies of rebellion and foregoing, after having given him to her *alter ego* in virginal state, Aglaia Epanchin, and then taken him away to show her power and demonstrate her own weakness, but she deserts him on the church steps for her lover Rogozhin, who murders her that night. Myshkin, finding him next morning, said more than "Forgive them, Father, they know not what they do"; he lay beside him in the night and bathed his temples with his tears, but fortunately in the morning when the murderer was a raving lunatic a merciful Providence had enshrouded Myshkin in his disease.

As Dimitri Merejkowski, the most understanding critic and interpreter of Dostoievsky who has written of him, truthfully says, his works are not novels or epics but tragedies. The narrative is secondary to the construction of the whole work and the keystone of the narrative is the dialogue between the characters. The reader feels that he hears real persons talking and talking without artifice just as they would talk in real life, and they express sentiments and convictions which one would expect from individuals of such inheritance, education, development and environment, obsessed particularly with the injustices of this world and the uncertainties of the world to be, concerned day and night with the immortality of the soul, the existence of God, the future of civilization. It has been said that he does not describe the appearance of his characters, for they depict themselves, their thoughts and feelings, their faces and bodies, by their peculiar form of language and tones of voices. Although he does not dwell on portraiture, he has scarcely a rival in delineation and his portraits have that quality which perhaps Leonardo of all others who worked with the brush had the capacity to do, and which Pater saw in the Gioconda: the revelation of the soul and its possibilities in the lineaments. The portrait of

Mlle. Lebyadkin, the imbecile whom the proud Nikolay Stavrogin married not from love or lust but that he might exhaust the list of mortifications, those of the flesh for himself, and those of pride for his family, that he might kill his instincts and become pure spirit, is as true to life as if Dostoevsky had spent his life in an Almshouse sketching the unfortunates segregated there. The art of portraiture cannot surpass this picture of Shatov, upon whose plastic soul Stavrogin impressed his immoralities in the shape of "the grand idea" and who said to Stavrogin in his agony, "Shan't I kiss your foot-prints when you've gone? I can't tear you out of my heart, Nikolay Stavrogin."

He was short, awkward, had a shock of flaxen hair, broad shoulders, thick lips, very thick overhanging white eyebrows, a wrinkled forehead, and a hostile, obstinately downcast, as it were shamefaced, expression in his eyes. His hair was always in a wild tangle and stood up in a shock which nothing could smooth. He was seven or eight and twenty.

In the same masterful way he has described Pyotr Verhovensky and Kirillov in *The Possessed*, the other souls that Stavrogin had captivated, and of Stavrogin himself. Indeed the pen pictures of the latter are uncanny, as is that of Feodor Karamazov which adheres to one's memory like a scarlet sin.

It is not as a photographer of the body that Dostoevsky is a source of power and inspiration in the world to-day, and will remain so for countless days to come, for he has depicted the Russian people as has no one else save Tolstoi, and his pictures constitute historical documents, but as photographer of the soul, a psychologist. Psychology is said to be a new science and a generation ago there was much ado over a new development called "experimental psychology" which was hailed as the key that would unlock the casket wherein repose the secrets of the mind, the windlass that would lift layer by layer the veil that has since man began concealed the mysteries of thought, behavior and action. It has not fulfilled its promise. It would be beyond the truth to say that it has been sterile, but it is entirely true to say that the contributions that it has made have been as naught compared with those made by abnormal psychology. Some, indeed, contend that the only real contributions of value have come from a study of disease and deficiency, and their contentions are



granted by the vast majority of those entitled to an opinion. Dostoievsky is the master portrayer of madness and of bizarre states of the soul and of the mind that are on the borderland of madness. Not only does he depict the different types of mental alienation but by an intuition peculiar to his genius, by a species of artistic divination he has understood and portrayed their display, their causation, their onset—so often difficult to determine even for the expert—and finally the full development of the disease. Indeed, he forestalled the descriptions of the alienists. "They call me a psychologist," says Dostoievsky; "it is not true. I am only a realist in the highest sense of the word, that is I depict all the soul's depth. Arid observations of every-day trivialities I have long ceased to regard as realism—it is quite the reverse." It is the mission of one important branch of psychology to depict the soul's depth, the workings of the conscious mind, and as the interior of a house that one is forbidden to enter is best seen when the house has been shattered or is succumbing to the incidences of time and existence, so the contents of the soul are most discernible in the mind that has some of its impenetrabilia removed by disease. It was in this laboratory that Dostoievsky conducted his experiments, made his observations and recorded the results from which he drew conclusions and inferences. "In my works I have never said so much as the twentieth part of what I wished to say, and perhaps could have actually said. I am firmly convinced that mankind knows much more than it has hitherto expressed either in science or in art. In what I have written there is much that came from the depth of my heart", he says in a letter to a friendly critic, to which may be added that what he has said is in keeping with the science of to-day, and is corroborated by workers in other fields of psychology and psychiatry.

The annihilation of the sense of time in Dostoievsky's stories was first dwelt upon by Merejkowski and it has been much discussed by all of his serious commentators. Events occur and things take place within a few hours in his stories which would ordinarily take months and years. The reason for this timeless cycle of events may be sought in the experiences that the author had in the moments preceding his attacks of epilepsy in

which he had thoughts and emotions which a lifetime would scarcely suffice to narrate.

Dostoevsky was a rare example of dual personality. His life was the expression of his ego personality (and what a life of strife and misery and unhappiness it was!), revealed with extraordinary lucidity in his *Letters* and *The Journal of an Author*, and his legacy to mankind is the record of his unconscious mind revealed in his novels. The latter is the life he would have liked to live and in it he depicts the changes in man's moral nature that he would have liked to witness. His contention was that man should be master of his fate, captain of his soul. He must express his thought and conviction in action and conduct, particularly in his relation to his fellow-man. He must take life's measure and go to it no matter what it entails or how painful, unpleasant or disastrous the struggle, or the end.

Many thoughtful minds believe that Dostoevsky has shown us the only salvation in the great crisis of the European conscience. The people, it matters not of what nationality, still possess the strength and equilibrium of internal power. The conviction that man shall not live only as a beast of burden still survives in the Russian people and is shared with them by the masses throughout the civilized world. Salvation from internal anarchy was his plea, and it is the plea that is to-day being made by millions in other lands than his.

As a prophet he foresaw the supremacy of the Russian people, the common people succored to knowledge, faith and understanding by liberty, education and health; and by conformation to its teaching the renaissance of the Christian faith which shall be a faith that shall show man how to live and how to die, and which shall be manifest in conduct as well as by word of mouth; primacy of the Russian church and the consummation of European culture by the effort and propaganda of Russia. "Russia is the one God-fearing nation and her ultimate destiny shall be to make known the Russian Christ for the salvation of lost humanity." No one can say at this day that his prophecies may not come true, and to the student of history there may seem to be more suggestive indication of it in the Russia of to-day than half a century ago, for from a world in ferment unexpected distillations may

flow. But to the person who needs proof Russia is silent now. Dostoevsky's doctrines have not dropped as the rain, nor has his speech been distilled as the dew, though he published the name of the Lord and ascribed greatness unto our God. Indeed, the fate that has overtaken Russia would seem to deny the possibility of the fulfillment of his prophecies either for his country or his people.

As a narrator of the events of life here, and of the thoughts of life here and hereafter, he has had few peers of any nation or language. That he did it in a disorderly way must be admitted; that the events of his tragedies had little time incidence is obvious to the most casual reader; that the reader has to bring to their perusal concentration and application is beyond debate; and that his characters are "degenerates", using that word in its biological sense, there is no doubt. But despite all these he succeeded in straining through from man's unconscious mind to his conscious, and then expressing it in thought and deed as the essence of the Russian's soul, and his books are the imperishable soul-prints of his contemporaneous countrymen. He foresaw with clairvoyancy the necessity of making religion livable, not professable with the lips and scorned in action, but a code or formulation that would combine Life, Love and Light pragmatically and although he was not able to formulate his thought or to express it clearly and forcibly, to synthesize and codify it, as it were, formulators of the new religion, of Christianity revived or dematerialized, will consult frequently and diligently the writings of Feodor Dostoevsky.

JOSEPH COLLINS.